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E.O. 12958: DECL: 10/30/2018
TAGS: [SNAR](#) [EAIR](#) [ELAB](#) [ECON](#) [PGOV](#) [GT](#)
SUBJECT: NARCOTRAFFICKERS INCREASINGLY INFILTRATE CIVAIR
OPERATIONS

REF: A. GUATEMALA 1231
[1](#)B. GUATEMALA 1180

Classified By: Ambassador McFarland for reasons 1.4(b,d)

[1](#)1. (C) Summary: In a meeting with Embassy officers, civil aviation authorities and union representatives expressed concern over the increased presence of narcotraffickers in civil aviation operations, particularly in Puerto Barrios in the eastern part of the country (ref A). They highlighted the harmful impact of narcotrafficking on tourism, commerce, and economic development, and requested support to help resolve the growing problem. End Summary.

[1](#)2. (C) Embassy officers met with Civil Aviation Director Juan Jose Carlos and representatives of the Civil Aviation Workers' Union on October 21 to discuss their concern over increasing infiltration by narcotraffickers in civil aviation operations, particularly in Puerto Barrios, Izabal. Carlos noted that numerous aircraft were arriving from the south and landing on the abandoned, uncontrolled landing strips in Puerto Barrios, including a remote corner of a landing strip controlled by a known narcotrafficker.

[1](#)3. (C) Carlos described the problem as "very serious," and stressed the need for international collaboration, including Embassy support, to resolve the problem, which the GOG has not been able to resolve on its own. He emphasized that the infiltration of narcotraffickers in the civil aviation infrastructure affects not only tourism, but export of goods as well as the country's overall economic development.

[1](#)4. (S) Carlos remarked that he and the Civil Aviation Workers' Union have been working closely together on this issue as well as other issues of mutual concern, and underscored the importance of safeguarding the physical security of union members. Jose Arturo Ruiz Trhamppe, coordinator of the union, indicated that the union has 533 members and is represented in every airport in the country. He shared Carlos' concern, noting that there have been several threats against union members in Puerto Barrios, and that civil aviation officials allegedly involved in narcotrafficking activities may have been involved in the murder of Amilcar Mendez' son Pepe, who worked at the control tower at Guatemala City's La Aurora airport. (Note: Investigators of the UN-led International Commission Against Impunity in Guatemala (CICIG) have concluded that Pepe Mendez was involved in arranging landing permission for narcotrafficking flights at La Aurora. He mistakenly denied clearance to a plane carrying three tons of cocaine. It circled the airport five times before crashing; traffickers killed Pepe in response. End Note.)

[1](#)5. (C) Carlos said he had discussed the narcotrafficking problem with former Minister of Government Vinicio Gomez and is currently coordinating with the Office of the Presidency. An investigator was previously assigned by the Ministry of Government to examine the influence of narcotraffickers at

the airport but was asked to leave due to poor performance. A new investigator has been assigned by the Office of the Presidency, whom Carlos described as "very professional." A Public Ministry investigator is also working on the case. Carlos noted that the airport security team planned to meet with CICIG Commissioner Castresana later that day.

¶6. (C) General Jorge Perusina, National Manager of Airport Security, affirmed that the Public Ministry as well as CICIG Commissioner Carlos Castresana were aware of the situation following the July 2008 arrest of Luis Fernando Archila Lima, Chief of Security of the General Directorate of Civil Aviation (DGAC) in Puerto Barrios, for drug possession. According to press accounts, Archila Lima was arrested soon after authorities raided an airport control tower where two ounces of heroin were found in his bed. Perusina claimed that Archila Lima was assigned to revamp security at the Puerto Barrios airport in May 2008 and implied that he was set up. The drugs in the tower were found a few weeks after Archila Lima had submitted a confidential report to him about suspected narcotrafficking infiltration at the airport.

¶7. (C) Comment: The seemingly close working relationship between civil aviation management and the workers' union is a rare and positive example in a country where labor unions have faced numerous challenges in exercising their freedom of association. It recognizes that the increasingly complex and systemic problem of narcotrafficking threatens management and workers alike and requires coordinated effort. The Embassy continues to support improved airport security through the USG-GOG Airport Security Working Group (ref B) that brings together USG and GOG security, law enforcement, customs, and immigration officials to address critical issues on a bi-weekly basis.
McFarland